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*Leadership Competency Series*

# Effort and Balance are Leadership Secrets

*Achievement orientation is a concern for working well to surpass standard of excellence. Achievement oriented leaders prefer to put effort and design the process for achievement rather than leaving it to chance, says M R Chandramowly.*

It was an August evening of vacation at a green and cool location in south of France. I was dining with Srinivasa, Mr Desme, his wife and daughter in their spacious garden stretched out from the back of their house. It was a comfortable cold evening for some time, before small trickles of rain drops sparkled on our table. Mr Desme, our host quickly went in and switched on the auto- canopy, which started unfolding above us, while we continued to chat. Mr Desme is a quality manager of a manufacturing multinational. He has spent years working with people of different cultures around the globe. His colleague Srinivasa is also a quality manger working in France and Bulgaria and we were talking about human achievement and about how people display sense of achievement globally. I asked Mr Desme, who had spent many years working in Japan, to differentiate the leadership success of people in Japan, comparing with those in other countries like France, China or India. What came out from him was more interesting than the French bread, mozzarella cheese or the old wine that Mr Desme pulled out from his cellar collection. Mr Desme said that a Japanese manager thinks first about the achievement for his country and then, about the goals of his organisation before finally he links up to what he must achieve himself. On the contrary, Mr Desme said, it is mostly in the reverse order in other countries. Though he did not mention India, I felt it could fit well too. We think about ourselves and then consider others around us and very few expand their achievement orientation band to national and global level.

One of the fascinating phenomena of leadership success is the intense need for achievement. Why only some people display high need for achievement and majority have less concern about the same? This became the focus of research over twenty years for David C McClelland. Is achievement a distinct human motive? Can it be distinguished from other needs? Can it be assessed? Yes, says the research of McClelland.

## Achievement orientation

Achievement Orientation involves working to achieve results and improve individual and organisational contribution. Achievement Orientation is a concern for working well or for surpassing a standard of excellence. The standard may be one's own past performance (striving for improvement); an objective measure (results orientation); outperforming others (competitiveness); challenging goals one has set; or trying something new that will improve organisational results (innovation). Achievement Orientation also involves effectively managing internal and external resources to achieve the organisational goals.

McClelland's research led him to believe that the need for achievement is a distinct human motive that can be distinguished from other needs. More important, the achievement motive can be isolated and assessed in any group.

## Rings over the peg

The professor and the participants were engaged in a behavioural training workshop. The professor gave instructions to participants to play a game. Each participant was given some plastic rings and they were all ready to throw them over the peg. They were told to choose any distance and the task was to put more rings over the peg. Most of the participants threw the rings by choosing some throws far way and some from close distance on the peg. But few participants carefully measured where they were most likely to get a sense of mastery — not too close to make the task ridiculously easier or not too far away to miss the target. They chose moderately difficult but achievable goals. Professor McClelland thus

identified the characteristics of people with high need for achievement. How a Gilchrist, a Jayasurya or a Sehwag bags his sixes and fours successively? Do they focus on the scores? Or on each delivery of the ball? Their success depends on the instant choice of deciding how much effort is needed to swing the bat, so that the ball flies away from the ground, crossing the boundary line; and the balance they maintain while striking the ball to ensure not to get caught. Whether it is cricket or tennis; basketball or golf, what brings out success is the application and combination of effort and balance. Achievement oriented people do not believe in winning by chance. They prefer to put effort and design the process for achievement rather than leaving it to chance, destiny or luck.

## Aggressive Realism

In leadership practices, we see a set of people who take high risk and even compromise on ethics to achieve an outcome, which is beyond their capability. There are conservatives who do not take big risks but play with small risks of little danger to ensure nothing goes wrong. Achievement oriented people take the middle path, preferring a moderate degree of risk and balance their competence to influence the outcome. McClelland observed these people are more concerned with personal achievement than with rewards of success. Though they enjoy rewards, they feel that rewards cannot replace sense of achievement.

I know of a manager who refused to accept a secret reward offered to him by his boss from a point of individual liking and appreciation. He said, "I am happy to receive a reward in public, for achieving what I consider credible and superior than getting a gift of personal liking". He told his boss his desire to know and get rewarded for how well he is doing his job than how he helped his boss and how much he likes him. How well a manager does his job, relates to his level of achievement orientation. It is common human desire to know the scores of social and attitudinal feedback. But achievers look out beyond that, to know the job-relevant feedback. What makes achievement-oriented people behave as they do? McClelland claims it is because they habitually spend time thinking about doing things better. In fact, he has found that wherever people start to think in achievement terms, things start to happen. Achievement oriented people climb corporate ladders and knit their fast track by putting constant effort to try and think of better ways of doing things. Organisations with more achievement-oriented people grow rapidly and become more profitable. McClelland has even extended his analysis to prove the related presence of a large percentage of achievement-motivated individuals to the national economic growth.

## Developing Competency

Yes. Though not easy, it can be done, said McClelland who developed training programs for business people that were designed to increase achievement motivation. Developing achievement competency has two dimensions. Applying it to self to become a more achievement oriented manager and inspiring others to make them build achievement orientation. Highly job oriented managers can become individual achievers and may be found less effective in making others to do the same. Though achievement oriented people are needed for organisations they do not always make best managers unless they develop and use human skills. Good producers need not always be effective managers.

McClelland has found that achievement-oriented people are more likely to be developed in families in which parents hold different expectations for their children than other parents do. “More importantly, these parents expect their children to start showing some independence between the ages of six and eight, making choices and doing things without help, such as knowing the way around the neighbourhood and taking care of themselves around the house. Other parents tend either to expect this too early, before children are ready, or to smother the development of the personality of these children. One extreme seems to foster passive, defeated attitudes, as children feel unwanted at home and incompetent away from home. They are just not ready for that kind of independence so early. The other extreme yields either overprotected or over-disciplined children. These children become very dependent on their parents and find it difficult to break away and make their own decisions. McClelland’s concept of achievement motivation is also related to Herzberg’s motivation-hygiene theory. People with high achievement motivation tend to be interested in the motivators (the job itself). In summary, according to David C McClelland’s research, achievement-motivated people have certain

**characteristics in common, including:**

**"The capacity to set high ('stretching') personal but obtainable goals, "The concern for personal achievement rather than the rewards of success, and "The desire for job-relevant feedback (how well am I doing?) rather than for attitudinal feedback (how well do you like me?)" (Accel-Team on McClelland)**

## Defining Levels

**Level "A" manager tries to do the job well or right, organises people, and allocates tasks and responsibilities that will facilitate the achievement of the organisation's goal. He keeps track of and measures outcomes against a standard of excellence not imposed by others.**

**Rising above, in Level B, a manager sets and achieves individual performance targets aligned with the business plan but keeps track of and measures outcomes against a standard of excellence not imposed by others.**

**At "C" level, a manager is receptive to feedback from others on existing ideas, procedure and policies. He seeks out creative/innovative solutions for improvement in business outcomes. He questions conventional means of product /service delivery to more effectively and efficiently meet organisational goals. Makes specific changes in the system or in own work methods to improve performance (examples may include doing something better, faster, at lower cost, more efficiently; or improves quality, customer satisfaction, morale, etc.)**

**A level "D" manager sets and works to meet a goal that has a definite stretch, but not unrealistic or impossible. These may be goals one set for self or goals one set for direct reports. Effectively oversees a range of significant programs and time-sensitive issues using appropriate resources. Refers to specific measures of baseline performance compared with better performance at a later point of time. He may say "When I took over, efficiency was 20 per cent — now it is up to 85 per cent." Sets out to achieve a unique standard of people and process oriented goals like; "No one had ever done it before."**

**Top at level "E", a manager analysis for organisational outcomes in order to make decisions, sets priorities on the basis of calculated inputs and outputs. He includes analysing both process and people-related outcomes. Provides leadership in effective management and stewardship of resources. Makes decisions that allocate limited resources (time, people, budgetary, etc) to meet product or service delivery. He knows how and when to influence policy development in order to impact policy and delivery outcomes.**

***"If a wrestler fails to defeat his rival,***

***Are his grips, efforts and practice futile?***

***Touch the body and feel his steel muscle,***

***Strength is the gym's gift than winning a tussle."***

**(Dr D V G's kagga -588).**

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